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Leaders' Facial Features as a Potential Source of Information for Prospective Team Members

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The “Abridged” Version:

Question: Can prospective team members to infer group characteristics from a leader’s facial features? **Empirical Test:** One scenario-based study was conducted. **Findings:** The answer is YES. High facial dominance (masculinity features) of a leader is related to perceptions of high vertical and low horizontal mobility of the team. Prospective team members use different cues to create impressions of team characteristics and a leader’s facial features is one source of information.

Background

- ❖ Social psychology highlights to importance of group perceptions and its influence on its members. For example:
 - ❖ People respond in a complementary manner toward their potential task partner (Tiedens et al., 2007).
 - ❖ Preferences for types of leaders depend on the perception of the leader, the message they bring and the environment that the group faces (Spisak et al., 2011).

- ❖ Thus, team members, current or prospective, are active perceivers.

Interestingly,

- ❖ Prior research indicate the informational value of leaders’ facial features regarding his/her capacity to achieve financial success (e.g., Rule & Ambady, 2008; 2009; Wong et al., 2011).
- ❖ **Critical Link 1:** Carre et al. (2009) - Leaders with a greater facial width-to-height ratio tend toward a greater propensity for aggression and this is accurately predicted by perceivers.
 - ❖ **What this means:** Facial features of leaders are linked with certain behavioral & decision-making tendencies, which can shape the team’s climate and team members’ expectations and responses.
- ❖ **Critical Link 2:** Tiedens et al. (2007) – Individuals are more likely to change their behavior in response to their partner's, including expected partners.
 - ❖ **What this means:** There is a dynamic interplay between perception and subsequent behavioral interactions which can contribute to the team climate.

- Putting these findings together, it is possible that team members perceive and respond towards these facial features, shaping the team climate. Nature of the team thus can be inferred from the leader’s face by prospective team members.

Leaders’ Facial Features as a Potential Source of Information for Prospective Team Members

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Present Study

- ❖ We focused on mobility as a team characteristic and investigated whether traits inferred from dominant facial features of leaders can result in different perceptions of team mobility. We hypothesized:
 - ❖ Individuals perceiving leaders with dominant faces would infer that his/her team has high vertical mobility.
 - ❖ Vertical mobility: whether opportunities (obstacles) are present to allow (disallow) the movement up or down a social hierarchy within an organization.
 - ❖ Individuals perceiving leaders with dominant faces would infer that his/her team has low horizontal mobility.
 - ❖ Vertical mobility: whether opportunities (obstacles) are present to allow (disallow) the ease in forming new relationships within the organization; nature of a team's social network with other teams.

Method

- 73 Participants recruited via Amazon Mturk and were first briefed on concepts of vertical and horizontal mobility.
- They were then shown 15 male and 15 female Caucasian face photos, presented individually. Each photo was rated for dominance, attractiveness, congeniality, and age:
 - Dominance: ($\alpha = .67$, $M = 4.52$; $SD = 1.23$)
 - Overall, how dominant do you think this person is?
 - Overall, how competent do you think this person is?
 - Attractiveness: ($\alpha = .97$, $M = 3.26$; $SD = 1.37$)
 - Overall, how good looking do you think this person is?
 - Overall, how attractive do you think this person is?
 - Congeniality: ($\alpha = .73$, $M = 4.09$; $SD = 1.22$)
 - Overall, how benevolent do you think this person is?
 - Overall, how trustworthy do you think this person is?
 - Age: ($M = 40.22$, $SD = 12.03$)
- Participants were then asked to imagine that the rated target was a group leader and to rate the horizontal and vertical of his/her group:
 - If the person is the group leader, how vertically mobile do you think the group would be? ($M_{\text{vertical mobility}} = 4.35$, $SD_{\text{vertical mobility}} = 1.67$)
 - If the person is the group leader, how horizontally mobile do you think the group would be? ($M_{\text{horizontal mobility}} = 4.41$, $SD_{\text{horizontal mobility}} = 1.48$)

Analysis

- We obtained 2190 data points (73 participants rating 30 photos each). Since data structure was multi-level (Leader pictures embedded within each participant), we conducted Hierarchical Linear Modelling.

Results

	γ		SE	df	t-Value
DV: Vertical Mobility					
Part. Gender ^a	.10		.17	72	.62
Target Gender ^b	-.12		.06	2153	-1.85
Age ^c	-.00		.00	2210	-.62
Dominance	.13		.03	2203	4.04**
Attractiveness	.10		.03	2048	3.26**
Congeniality	.25		.03	2116	7.66**
DV: Horizontal Mobility					
Part. Gender	.16		.15	71	1.07
Target Gender	-.04		.05	2152	-.74
Age	-.01		.00	2212	-4.97**
Dominance	-.17		.03	2209	-6.52**
Attractiveness	.16		.02	2092	6.15**
Congeniality	.42		.03	2145	15.5**

Notes: * $p < .05$, ^aGender of participants; ^bGender of the leader; ^cPerceived age of the leader; γ = average regression weight; SE = standard error; df = degrees of freedom

Summary

- ❑ Dominant looking leaders have differential relationships with prospective team members’ perceptions toward vertical and horizontal team mobility
- ❑ When individuals perceived leaders to have dominant faces, their teams were thought to have:
 - ❑ High vertical mobility
 - ❑ Low horizontal mobility
- ❑ Prospective members’ perceptions are important to note because these represent a component that may shape their initial and subsequent behaviors and decisions within the team.